

Presentation to the Blaine House Conference on Maine's Creative Economy
Governor John E. Baldacci

Welcome to Lewiston!

It is my honor to open today's conference. The momentum leading up to today's conference is overwhelming -- months of planning and organizing, months of outreach sessions and forums across the state, months of research.

I have five words for you: YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHING YET.

Today is just the beginning.

Today we will open the door even wider to an exciting vision of the future of Maine.

Today we will open the door even wider to everyone in this state who wants to invest in the creation of good paying jobs and vibrant communities.

Today we will open the door even wider to the concept that every Maine person can reach his or her full potential if we embrace the arts, embrace creativity, embrace diversity, embrace entrepreneurship, embrace innovation.

Today we will open the door even wider to the conclusion that we must provide world-class education to our youth and world-class training to our workers.

Today we will open the door even wider to dialog on policies and actions that will grow Maine's economy for years to come.

We are here today in Lewiston. Lewiston-Auburn is in the middle of a renaissance, a renaissance that today we call the Creative Economy. Lewiston-Auburn has invested in its downtown, invested in its riverfront and embraced its Franco heritage. Lewiston-Auburn is bursting with festivals – the dance festival, the Great Falls festival, L-A Arts and new cultural centers.

Thank you, Lewiston, for actively embracing diversity and growth. As a result of the decisions made by the leaders and the people of Lewiston-Auburn, we are seeing new jobs and new opportunities.

In so many ways the Creative Economy is really about social capital. Robert Putnam describes social capital as networks between private, public and nonprofit sectors. Social capital comes from recognizing that the arts and education are integrally linked to jobs and economic growth. Social capital is community leadership, networks and trust. Social capital is about welcoming new jobs, welcoming change, inviting new immigrants, inviting new opportunities. Today Lewiston-Auburn proves the premise that investing in social capital is the same as investing in jobs.

I come from Bangor. Bangor is also in the middle of a renaissance driven by the vision of the Creative Economy. Bangor has invested in its downtown. With new partnerships with the University of Maine, Bangor has brought new life and new jobs to the City. New museums and the National Folk Festival have created a synergy that is resulting in jobs – new restaurants, new tourists, people moving to Bangor with their companies because Bangor has made investments in the future. Architecture firms, software firms, investment firms can locate anywhere they want to. They are coming to Bangor because of quality of life, live music, museums, safe streets and access to world-class natural resources. The Creative Economy is the cohesive force of excitement and creativity that is behind Bangor's growth.

I know that communities all across Maine are poised for a renaissance. There are people here from Rumford, Greenville and Dover Foxcroft that are bringing growth to their communities. Aroostook County is growing because of investments by the Libra Foundation and Maine Winter Sports – bringing world-class tourism and recreation and athletics to northern Maine. We are making news and we are turning around indicators on personal income growth and immigration. People are bringing their families to our safe communities and our lakes. And when they come, they bring with them their prosperity, their capital and their companies.

The Creative Economy captures everything that is magical about economic growth. The Creative Economy is what exists when we recognize that every individual in our community is an economic engine. Every individual has the potential to be an entrepreneur – or artist – or musician – every individual has the right to fully explore his or her potential as a productive member of a vibrant community.

Entrepreneurship is not just a concept – it takes investment. We need to nurture and celebrate small business start-ups. Our universities and community colleges are building a curriculum that supports the free market and critical economic sectors including the arts and tourism. We are working with the private sector to align research and development and education in key sectors to create spin-off business – high-growth job opportunities built on the foundation of Maine's world-class universities and colleges.

In the last several years there have been efforts from Washington, DC to dismantle funding of the arts. These attacks have been countered by evidence showing that the arts significantly contribute to our communities – socially, culturally and economically. Research shows that investing in the arts in our schools raises SAT scores. The arts add to our social capital and engage people to become more active and involved in their communities – through libraries, rotaries and other community pursuits. Social capital enhances economic capital, with individual and communities alike stimulated to improve their towns and their state. Maine is a better place to live because of the arts.

Today's conference will be exciting. And I hope each of you will stay engaged as we move from this conference to an action agenda over the next few months.